

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4064

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 2410

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, BG

SUBJ: MEA COMMENTS ON FARAKKA

REF: DACCA 691

1. THE PRESS HAS REPORTED THE JANUARY 30 STATEMENT OF PARLIAMENT'S PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE THAT INDIA IS NOW WITHDRAWING 40,000 CUSECS OF WATER FROM FARAKKA. THE COMMITTEE CONCLUDED THAT A CONSTANT SUPPLY OF 40,000 CUSECS, "DIFFICULTIES NOTWITHSTANDING," WAS ESSENTIAL AND SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS FEBRUARY 13, JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH DIVISION AJMANI ALSO ASSERTED THAT INDIA HAD ABSOLUTE FOR 40,000 CUSECS ALL YEAR ROUND INCLUDING THE LEAN SEASON. HE INSISTED THE NON-LEAN PART OF THE YEAR HAS NEVER BEEN A SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION WITH BDG. AJMANI GAVE NO INDICATION OF AWARENESS THAT BANGLADESH IS NOW ENCOUNTERING A WATER PROBLEM ALTHOUGH "COINCIDENTALLY" HE HAD ALL RELEVANT PAPERS IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE ON HIS DESK. (WE NOTE THE STATE-
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MENT--DACCA 0782--OF B.M. ABBAS, BDG ADVISOR ON FLOOD

CONTROL, THAT BDG HAS OFFICIALLY RAISED THIS PROBLEM WITH THE GOI.) AJMANI SAID INDIA IS AGREEABLE TO CONSIDERING THE WATER PROBLEM WITH BANGLADESH ONLY WITH RESPECT TO THE LEAN PERIOD WHICH MEANT MID-MARCH TO MID-MAY. THIS DEFINITION OF THE LEAN PERIOD WAS, HE SAID, DECIDED AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE GOI AND APPEARS IN ALL INDO-BANGLADESH DOCUMENTS ON THE SUBJECT, AND WAS NOT ALTERABLE. THERE ARE NO PLANS AT THIS POINT TO ENTER INTO A NEW AGREEMENT COVERING THE 1976 LEAN PERIOD, AS WAS DONE LAST YEAR, AND THERE ARE NO MEETINGS SCHEDULED TO DISCUSS THE WATER PROBLEM WITH BANGLADESH, ALTHOUGH IF THE BDG WISHED TO HAVE SUCH DISCUSSIONS, THE GOI WOULD BE AGREEABLE.

2. AJMANI ARGUED THAT INDIA HAD AN ABSOLUTE RIGHT TO THE LION'S SHARE OF THE GANGES' WATERS GIVEN THE FACT THAT FOR MOST OF ITS COURSE THE RIVER WAS IN INDIA. HE MINIMIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RIVER TO BANGLADESH. AJMANI EXPLAINED THAT BANGLADESH'S MAXIMUM NEED FOR GANGES' WATER YEAR-ROUND WAS ONLY 1500 CUSECS. EXCEPT FOR THE LEAN PERIOD, 103,000 CUSECS WERE AVAILABLE. DURING THE LEAN PERIOD THIS WAS REDUCED TO AN AVERAGE OF 55,000 CUSECS. SINCE INDIA WAS SEEKING TO WITHDRAW ONLY 40,000 CUSECS, AJMANI ARGUED THAT EVEN DURING THE LEAN PERIOD THERE WOULD BE ENOUGH WATER TO TAKE CARE OF BANGLADESH'S NEEDS. ASKED WHY INDIA HAD AGREED LAST YEAR NOT TO TAKE MORE THAN A MAXIMUM OF 16,000 CUSECS DURING THE LEAN PERIOD, AJMANI DENIED THAT IT WAS OUT OF DEFERENCE TO THE NEEDS OF THE BANGALEES, BUT RATHER BECAUSE INDIA WANTED TO BREAK IN THE NEW CANAL SYSTEM SLOWLY. HE ALSO NOTED THAT LAST YEAR THAT LAST YEAR THE BDG (SHEIKH MUJIB'S GOVT.) HAD NOT BEEN WILLING TO ALLOW THE INDIANS TO EXAMINE BANGLADESH WELLS, CANALS, AND WATER USAGE DURING THE LEAN PERIOD.

3. COMMENT: AS USUAL, AJMANI PROVIDED A FAIRLY INFLEXIBLE PICTURE OF GOI POLICY. IF HE IS TO BE BELIEVED, THE GOI DOES NOT ACCEPT THE BDG'S EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN ABOUT WATER SHORTAGES AND WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CONVINCE. THE INDIANS PRESUMABLY WILL ARGUE THAT THE RELEVANT

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QUESTION IS NOT HOW MUCH WATER THE BDG MAY NEED AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE FOR ANTICIPATED PROJECTS AND DEVELOPMENT, BUT HOW MUCH IS ACTUALLY NEEDED NOW. AJMANI IMPLIED THAT THE GOI WOULD ALWAYS BE WILLING TO DISCUSS INCREASED BDG REQUIREMENTS, BUT THESE WOULD NOT EXCEED 4,500 CUSECS AT THE MOST AS CURRENTLY ENVISAGED. THIS WOULD MEAN THAT AT LEAST 40,000 CUSECS WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO INDIA EVEN DURING THE LEAN PERIOD. AJMANI IMPLIED

THAT WITH OR WITHOUT A NEW AGREEMENT FOR THE LEAN PERIOD
INDIA CONSIDERED 40,000 ITS MINIMUM REQUIREMENT AND
INTENDED TO WITHDRAW IT.
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